

CIACO

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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

POLAND: Reform in the Party

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The Polish Communist Party leadership is adopting a moderately reformist course in response to growing demands from the rank and file for party reform. It seems prepared to overhaul the top party organs by bringing up more lower ranking party members. This will give the leadership a uniquely "petletarian" look, but other evidence of a commitment to change will be necessary to mollify the reformers. Partial measures may only encourage demands for more radical changes that would seriously test the limits of Soviet tolerance. [REDACTED]

Solidarity's attack on the bureaucratic values of the traditional Communist state has fragmented the Polish party. Many members, embittered by revelations of corruption and malfeasance, have resigned. Many other members are seeking guarantees of greater intraparty democracy and new control over the party bureaucracy and leadership, in order to avoid a repetition of mistakes and to ensure the permanence of broader reforms. [REDACTED]

The reformist movement, although potentially strong, thus far lacks effective organization and national leaders. Its influence, nonetheless, has been evident for months; it prompted the party leadership in December to endorse the practice initiated by some local party organizations of electing local officials by secret ballot. Party chief Kania and the rest of the leadership fear reform efforts to break the party bureaucracy's control over policy and decisionmaking, and they are trying to appear responsive. [REDACTED]

Reformists More Effective

Despite Kania's efforts, the pressure has become more intense, more public, and more organized. The party leadership's mishandling of the incident at Bydgoszcz and its tardiness in moving ahead on party reforms widened the rift between the leaders and the general membership. [REDACTED]

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The gap grew in late March after the Central Committee failed to heed demands for the ouster of hardliners from the top leadership. The Central Committee's inaction prompted grass-roots reformers to take their first serious organizing step by holding a meeting last week involving about 800 liberals from 11 provinces.

The leadership is trying to regain the initiative--and new support--by showing a commitment to some measure of reform. With Kania in the lead, it is consulting with the rank and file and publicizing the results, and it is liberalizing the party statutes.

Party leaders also now seem inclined to try former officials on charges of corruption and malfeasance. In addition, they evidently are prepared to make extensive personnel changes in the Central Committee and Politburo at the Central Committee session scheduled for next Wednesday.

Kania's Position

Although Kania has been weakened by the events of the last several weeks, he is likely to remain party leader. He still seems the cautious moderate in a Politburo controlled by moderates, and there are no signs that the Soviets are seeking his removal.

The few outright hardliners in the leadership are likely to remain despite party members' demands for their removal. Kania probably calculates that their presence is reassuring to Moscow.

Kania would not want to be seen as giving in to the masses by removing specific persons. The hardliners also serve Kania's purpose by making him appear more moderate by comparison.

The Central Committee session probably will enlarge the Politburo by adding representatives from the grass roots. Although this is likely to make the Politburo more reform-minded, newcomers will be carefully chosen and their impact may be limited.

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Kania probably will be strengthened and the influence of the hardliners diluted by the enlargement. The Central Committee itself is likely to be purged of former provincial party leaders, who will be replaced by new provincial officials and by ordinary party members. [REDACTED]

These moves will enable the leadership to claim that it is more representative of the party, thereby undercutting the radical reformers. If it is to ensure its support at the next party congress, however, the leadership will still have to contend with the organizing efforts of some reformers and must try to manage discreetly the secret ballot process of selecting delegates to the congress. These will be no easy tasks, and the presence of newcomers from the ranks may make the tasks more difficult. [REDACTED]

Outlook

The Kania leadership probably realizes its limited reforms will not satisfy the radicals, but it may believe that holding a party congress sooner rather than later will deny the reformers time to organize. It will discuss the congress, and presumably set a firm date for it, at the Central Committee meeting next week. In addition, it may be prepared to purge some of the radicals, even though this risks opening another rift. [REDACTED]

Party leaders also may believe that limited reforms in conjunction with a generally conciliatory policy toward key groups such as Solidarity and the Church will reduce pressure for radical reforms. The demands of hardliners and the Soviets, however, will prevent the regime from pursuing a uniformly conciliatory policy toward Solidarity, and renewed tensions with the unions will to some extent help keep alive the agitation for internal party reform. [REDACTED]

The possibility remains, moreover, that the party membership will not be satisfied with partial measures and will push for more changes--and that the party leadership in turn will adopt a more radical reformist stance that severely tests the Soviets' patience. If events reach this stage, Kania probably would have to be removed. [REDACTED]